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574 road in the evening, he immediately greets him, "bziala vahbeit" -- "it is good to see you!" Then he invites the traveler into his house; "Come in and rest, where are you going now? Spend the night in our house, and early in the morning go your way." If the traveler, be he an acquaintance or a stranger, accepts the invitation and puts up at the host's house, he receives a warm reception and is wonderfully well regaled. And if the traveler does not accept the invitation, he replies, "ubeikht" (grow rich, thank you) and continues on his way. The custom of hospitality protects the traveler even from blood-vengeance. Once he is someone's guest, no one has the right to touch him.

181 888 Along with his hospitality and generosity, the Abkhaz is also courteous, polite, and respectful, especially to older persons. Here are a few examples.

515 516 [264] Before taking any food the Abkhaz usually wash their hands. But the washing is performed in order of seniority, the ablution of the hands beginning with the oldest and ending with the youngest of those attending the banquet. The same order is observed in drinking wine. But on such occasions the oldest person does not lag behind either. In the beginning he renounces his right of priority and invites the person next in rank to drink wine or to wash his hands first. This is required by the custom of courtesy and politeness. But, of course, the younger person flatly refuses the honor offered him. Finally, after many mutual compliments and words of persuasion, the first one (the oldest) accepts the invitation after all. Then the same ceremony is gone through between the second and the third, the third and the fourth, and so on, down to the youngest person attending. Furthermore, while the oldest persons are washing their hands, the younger ones are obliged to remain standing. Here again there is ceremony, exhortations for them to sit down, but if those who are urged to do so ignore these exhortations and continue to stand, then the older person considers it improper to 576 wash his hands sitting down, and he also stands up. The question of which of two persons shall first cross the threshold and

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576 enter a house is decided with the same ceremoniousness. Or, for example, when two horsemen meet each other in the forest. If the younger of the two has something to say to the older one, he must dismount and speak while standing on the ground. At that point, the older one urges him to speak without dismounting.

/14/ The language of the Abkhaz also bears witness to their politeness. In conversation they often use such expressions as: "I ask that your sickness will pass on to me," "may I become the victim of your sicknesses," "may I be the victim instead of you," "may I go around the place where you are lying," etc. In keeping with this last expression, an Abkhaz woman, when visiting her sick foster-child or a person she has not seen for a [608] long time, walks three times around him with the words, "utsge [755] mtsuge seizgat," i.e. "may I carry away your sickness, your misfortune."

For every occasion in life, the Abkhaz has a special greeting, in which are expressed his wishes for prosperity, strength, victory, fertility, profit, etc. In this repertoire of various Abkhaz greetings, there are even some which are especially meant for occasions when one meets persons who are going to a horse-race, greetings for the person who is arranging 181 the races, and so forth. And this is quite understandable and natural for a people such as the Abkhaz, for whom horse and arms constitute the most beloved things, which they have been accustomed to value highly almost from the cradle. The children [565] of members of the upper classes in the very first years of their lives become excellent riders and weapon-bearers. Pistol, [411] dagger, saber, knife, and a whole arsenal of weapons are the [293] constant adornment of every Abkhaz man. For him there is no greater pleasure than to ride armed from head to foot, a burka thrown over him, in the company of his comrades, singing a merry song. Without a horse and arms, life is not worth living to an Abkhaz!

526 Besides horse-races and trick-riding, the following games [541] are worth noting in the life of the Abkhaz: 1. the ball-game, 538 2. arkil-riki, and 3. stone-throwing. The folk-music and folk-poetry of the Abkhaz are extremely meager.